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Buffalo Bill's Rifle-Shots



SURE SHOT LOWERED HIS RIFLE WITH THE EXCLAMATION. "I DO NOT BELIEVE
DIABLO DICK IS ONE OF THE ROAD-AGENTS."



OR, THE BUCKSKIN BRAVO'S LONE TRAIL.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAD SOLDIER.

"I am looking for the dead!"
"Well, I am rather much alive, soldier
pard, so you don't want me, I'm glad to say."
"No, not you, not you!
"But, tell me, where are they?"

"Who?"

"The Dead."

"In their graves, whar they oughter be."

"Won't yer take a seat in ther coach, pard, and go to the fort, fer it don't strike me yer head is just right; it's off ther trail o' reason."

"Come, git in, and ther post surgeon will set yer on ther right trail."

"Are they there?"

"Who?"

"The Dead."

"See here, pard, I hain't no spook hunter or comrade of stiffs; I'm flesh and bone, and you give me ther creepin' chills ter talk as yer does."

"I has a empty hearse, and you are welcome ter ride; so git in."

"No, no! I cannot, must not; I must find them."

The scene was on a trail in New Mexico, over which a stage coach made a weekly run from Santa Fe to the mines and settlements on the way to the terminus at Fort Comanche.

The driver, Nate Nixon, was on his way to the fort when he discovered at a point where the trail was very rough a man standing in his way, as though to bring him to a halt.

Nate Nixon was utterly fearless, and drove a deadly trail, for he had both Indians and outlaws to waylay him; yet he had no dread of the one he saw ahead in the trail, for he wore the uniform of a cavalryman in the United States Army.

"Some courier whose horse has given out," inferred Nate.

As he drew near, the soldier suddenly rallied from the dejected mood in which he had, seemingly, been plunged, brought his carbine up, and in a threatening manner called out:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

The driver had intended to halt, but the words and looks of the man quickened that intention. He drew up at once, and riveted his eyes scrutinizingly upon the man who barred his way, while he muttered:

"Ef he hain't got 'em then I'm sweetly lying. He's as crazy as a jack rabbit."

Nixon saw a man of fine proportions, dressed in a tattered uniform, with a face almost concealed by a long, heavy beard, and hair that hung upon his shoulders.

His face was darkly bronzed by exposure, but his eyes were bright and very piercing.

"Well, pard, I've halted; what does you want?" and Nate put his hand upon his revolver, lying on the seat by his side, now confident that he had a madman to deal with.

In answer the soldier passed his hand wearily across his forehead, as though to clear his brain, and made the startling reply:

"I am looking for the dead."

Feeling a pity for the man, of whose madness he was now assured, and wishing to have him properly cared for, the driver said in a kindly tone:

"I guess you'll find them you is looking for at Fort Comanche, pard, and I—"

Nate stopped suddenly, for his words seemed to excite the man terribly. He started as though the driver had fired upon him, instead of having spoken kindly.

His face became livid, and he suddenly shouted:

"Fort Comanche! Fort Comanche! My God, not there, not there!"

Startled himself at the effect on the man which the name of the fort had produced, Nixon firmly grasped his weapon, loath to fire upon a madman, but ex-

pecting a violent attack, and determined to act in self-defense.

But the soldier, as soon as he had uttered his words, turned, and with great bounds, went toward the timber on one side of the trail, and the next moment had leaped upon the back of a fine horse, which Nate saw waiting for him, and in another moment was flying away at a breakneck speed.

"Well! that about took ther narve out o' me, I'm free ter admit."

"Now, who on 'arth is he, fer I hain't heerd o' no lunatic asylum in these parts fer him ter git out of."

"Why, I'd ruther be held up by road-agents than meet him again, 'fore ther Lord I would!"

"Come, hosses, you must git along lively, fer he may take a notion ter come back," and Nate drove swiftly on his way.

CHAPTER II. PUT TO FLIGHT.

Nate Nixon was not a man to flinch at any danger. Scores of times he had proven that. His very driving of that long and perilous trail attested his dauntless nerve, for none but a man of extremest bravery would dare that duty. But he had a superstitious dread of what he was pleased to call "spooks," and looked with awe upon any who had lost their sanity.

As he drove on, and briskly, he kept his head half turned, his eyes glancing back to see if the mad soldier was pursuing him, still "looking for the dead."

So intent was he in gazing behind that he did not keep a weather eye out ahead, therefore did not see three men quickly step out into the trail ahead.

Two of the three had rifles; the third only had revolvers.

All were masked, and while those with the rifles stood on either side of the trail, with weapons ready, the third quietly waited in the centre of the track.

That was the group Nate Nixon noted when he again turned his gaze ahead, after a long look behind, the longer because he had heard a shout far back in the rear, he was certain. It might have been the cry of a panther, or the yowl of a hungry wolf, but Nate was certain that he was nearer right in deciding that it was a human voice.

But nothing appeared back on the trail; he was alone; yet, not alone, for there were the three masked men ahead, to meet his vision when he again looked in that direction.

He did not wait for a command to halt; no need for that; the attitude of the three was command enough; they were of the "Hands-up!" brigade, at a glance.

Nixon knew that he carried a lot of money, greenbacks, which he was bearing back to San Gabriel in return for gold sent in by the miners.

He had always prided himself upon his luck of having lost little by the Hands-up toll-takers, but now it looked very much as if he would pay big toll to make up for past good luck.

He beheld but the three, and might have resisted; but why throw his life away, and then have the coach robbed, after all?

So he pulled his teams to a halt and called out:

"Well, what's up?"

"You carry money, and plenty of it, Nate Nixon," answered the one who appeared to be the leader.

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"I don't take your word fer it."

"Come, no nonsense, for I happen to know that you are well fixed this trip."

"That I is—very well fixed; an' if yer don't think so jist look inside ther hearse and see ther soldiers that hes got you covered."

With bounds like deer, the three road-raiders sprung to the shelter of the timber, while Nate Nixon dexterously gave his whip a swing, and the teams sprung forward with frightened alacrity.

But the three men, not being fired upon as they had expected, sent two rifle shots after the daring driver, who crouched below the seat and drove on, one of the bullets tearing along the top of the coach, the other shattering one of the lamps to atoms.

The robbers, however, unfortunately for Nate, had their horses near, and within a minute all three were in hot pursuit.

Still Nixon was not one to halt when he realized that they were gaining, and the odds all against him. Not a halt! He coolly lifted the rifle which he always had on the deck behind him, ready for emergencies, and taking aim as best he could, with the coach swaying wildly, he pulled the trigger.

A wild yell broke from his lips as he saw the man at whom he had aimed tumble headlong from his saddle.

But, not dismayed, the other two urged their horses on the faster, and as Nate Nixon had to guide his now flying team just then, from the nature of the trail, he dared not use his revolvers, and found himself covered by one on each side, as the two men dashed up beside the coach.

"I don't wish to kill you, Nixon, but I will if you do not halt, and that quickly."

"You is very kind, and as I has about played my last trump I'll do as you say."

His foot pressed hard on the brake; he drew in his horses, and the coach came to a standstill, while Nate said, with a sneer:

"Ther soldier bluff scared yer bad; but, just look inter ther hearse and see what's thar."

He was playing another game to get a chance to use his revolver, and his words made the leader and his remaining man cautious.

They did not know but what they might yet be caught in some kind of a trap.

To add to their fears, there came to their hearing the rapid clatter of hoofs back on the trail, and in a moment more a commanding voice shouted:

"Follow me, men! Charge!"

The two road-agents saw a mounted soldier dash into view, his sabre in hand! Again they were scared from their prey, and deep into their horses' flanks they drove their spurs in rapid flight, disappearing over a ridge just as Nate Nixon saw sweep by him the mad soldier!

CHAPTER III. THE BUCKSKIN BRAVO.

"Well, I be blamed!"

Such was the emphatic exclamation of Nate Nixon as he beheld the mad soldier, whom he had feared even more than he had the road-raiders, fly by him at full speed.

The man was standing up in his stirrups, slashing right and left with his sabre at imaginary foes, and did not even appear to see the coach and the much astonished driver.

The mad rider looked straight ahead, as his splendid horse bounded along at terrific speed; from his lips broke commanding orders to an imaginary regiment of cavalry, and paying no heed that the two road-agents had gone away to

the right in rapid flight, he swept on up the trail and disappeared from sight.

When he had first heard the voice of the mad soldier, had seen him dash into view, Nate Nixon believed that a scouting party of cavalry had come to his rescue.

The next instant had revealed the truth.

As the mad horseman dashed out of sight up the trail, Nate Nixon uttered again the expression that gave vent to his feelings:

"Well, I be blamed!"

He made no immediate effort to go on, but sat on his box looking up the trail.

The road-agents might still return.

So might the mad soldier.

And Nate Nixon dreaded the latter the most, even though his coming had frightened off his foes.

At last he seemed to realize that he must act, and he gathered up his reins.

Glancing back over the trail, he saw the body of the dead outlaw whom he had shot from his saddle.

He lay just at the bend of the trail, several hundred yards back.

"I guess I'd better pick up my game, or ther boys won't think I has been gunning for folks," he muttered.

With this, as he could not turn his coach just there, he dismounted from his box, reloaded his rifle, slung it at his back, and tramped back to where the body lay.

Stooping, he raised the mask.

"Waal, I declar'!"

"It's one of them fellers I has seen at San Gabriel, one of Fandango Fred's gang.

"It'll surprise the boys when they sees him."

With this he shouldered the body, and hastening back to the coach, put it inside and, mounting, was starting upon his way when he again heard hoofs approaching.

"I hope it hain't that mad soldier, who's made another turn and got behind me."

"But he's liable to do anything," muttered Nate.

Then, as his keen ears told him there was but one horse coming, he said:

"I guess I hain't afeered ter tackle one, if it hain't that crazy cavalryman."

Another moment there dashed into view a horse and rider, coming along at a swinging pace.

He reined up suddenly just where the dead outlaw had fallen, and gazing an instant at the spot, came on at the same swift pace.

Nate Nixon had seen him the moment he appeared, and he cried in a tone of exultation:

"Sure Shot, as sure as I lives."

"My! how quick he seen that disturbance in ther trail whar ther outlaw tuk a tumble."

"Well, I'm right glad of his comp'ny, and no mistake."

The next moment the one whom he had called Sure Shot, the Buckskin Brave, reined up alongside of the coach and called out:

"Ho, Nate, what's gone wrong with you?"

It was a boy, or, rather, a youth of sixteen or thereabout.

He was rather small for his age, but of a hardy, sinewy form, and he was dressed in a cavalry fatigue uniform, without any insignia of rank.

He was clad in buckskin, wore top boots, officers', and a wide sombrero, and looked like a dashing young cavalryman.

His face was a striking one, so handsome was it, so fearless and determined for one of his years, and the hue to which

it was bronzed showed that he had passed his life out of doors.

The horse that he rode was a spirited one, equipped with a Texas saddle and bridle, and his weapons were a sabre, revolvers, rifle, and lariat, with a blanket and camping outfit, as though he was on a long trail.

In answer to his questions Nate Nixon said: "I'm glad yer has come, Little Sure Shot, fer with road-agents and a mad soldier, I'm all tuk aback!"

"You've got the material for a funeral in the old hearse I see."

"Yes, I kilt him."

"Road-agent?"

"Yes, one of three that held me up, and was run off by a mad soldier."

"A mad soldier?"

"Yes, does yer know of any crazy cavalryman escaped from the fort?"

"There was no crazy cavalryman there to escape, Nate."

"Well, ther one I seen is dead crazy, an' gittin' more so."

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISE.

At the words of Nate Nixon the youth laughed a merry, boyish laugh, and replied:

"Any wheels in your head, Nate, for there is no soldier missing from the fort."

"Nary wheel."

"I'm all right in ther head; but I tell yer I seen a mad soldier, as halted me, and was a-lookin' fer dead men, he told me."

"Who was he?"

"A mad soldier."

"Did he rob you?"

"Now, Little Sure Shot, don't you know Nate Nixon hain't ther man ter pan out onless odds is agin him?"

"I know your record, Nate; but it must have been a road-agent playing soldier to get up close to you."

"No, he wa'n't no road-agent."

"What did he want, then?"

"He were lookin' fer dead folks, he told me, and then rid off when I tole him I didn't have any stiffs on tap just then."

"But I c'u'd supply him now with one, and a dead agent to boot."

"And the road-agents attacked you after the mad soldier left?"

"Yes."

"They were in league with him."

"No, they warn't, Little Sure Shot, for he were as crazy as a jack rabbit in a prairie fire."

"Tell me all about it, Nate."

"I'll do it."

And Nate Nixon told his story just as it had happened, the boy listening with great attention.

"And he did not speak to you as he went by?"

"No, he didn't."

"He were that busy commandin' a reegement of cavalry he were leading, in his mind, that he didn't see me; he looked right ahead, but went along at a full run, carving off heads and arms, first on one side, then on t'other, until he got out of sight."

"I tell yer it were awful, Sure Shot."

"But his coming stampeded the road-agents?"

"You bet he did, and ef they'd hev stopped ter git better acquainted they'd hev been scared ter death."

"Thar's ther horse now of ther one I kilt, runnin' loose."

"I'll just take him in out of the wet," and the youth dashed off after the loose horse, swung his lariat, and skillfully caught the animal, leading him back to the coach with the remark:

"He's yours, Nate, and a good one."

"Thank yer, pard, but we'll go shares on him."

"I'll just fasten him to one of my leaders."

"No, Nate, I have no claim on him, and I only came after you because the sutler at the fort told me you carried big money for San Gabriel, and I was afraid you might he held up."

"I looked for Buffalo Bill to come along, too, but he's been off for a couple of days, the scouts said, so I came alone, and I am glad I did, for though I did no good, I'll continue on to San Gabriel with you."

"I'm mighty glad to have yer, Little Sure Shot, fer I knows what you is worth in trouble."

"Maybe we'll meet your mad soldier again, Nate."

"I just hopes not, fer I hain't stuck on seeing him no more, not a little bit."

The boy laughed and replied:

"Well, drive on, and I'll follow within earshot behind, to be on hand should you need aid."

"I'll lead the outlaw's horse, too, for the sound of more hoofstrokes will have an effect if you get into trouble, and they hear me coming."

"All right," and, tossing the rein of the riderless horse to Little Sure Shot, Nate Nixon mounted his box and drove on once more.

The youth waited until he had gotten a quarter of a mile ahead, and then rode on, leading the outlaw's horse by the stake rope.

For several miles Nate Nixon went briskly along, and there being no further appearance of the road-agents or the mad soldier, he was beginning to congratulate himself that he would reach San Gabriel with his treasure in safety.

Drawing rein in a small stream to water his horses, he remarked to himself, as he had a score of times before, that that was the very place for a hold-up of the coach by outlaws, and yet none of them had ever happened to select the spot for their lawless work.

The trail led down from the range by a winding way, and there ascended the hills on the other side by the same steep and circuitous kind of path.

The valley was narrow, heavily wooded, dotted with large boulders, and was a dark-looking spot even at noonday.

"Your horses are thirsty, Nate, but don't hurry them, for we have plenty of time."

The words fell like a death-knell upon the ears of Nate Nixon.

At last the outlaws had selected the spot he had dreaded, and were there to bar his way.

He looked up quickly at the sound of the voice, and beheld several rifles peering at him over a rock on a level with the top of the coach, and masked faces were peering along the sights of the leveled rifles.

CHAPTER V.

A CRACK SHOT.

Nate Nixon was painfully surprised at the words of the outlaw and the sight of the rifles covering him.

His first thought of resistance he saw would be madness, and the cool remark of the outlaw showed that he knew that he held the winning hand, and would take his time, fearing no resistance or rescue.

Then Nate's thoughts were of the youth, whom he knew was following.

Would not he come up and run into a deadly trap, instead of aiding him?

How could he warn him, he wondered. A quick glance revealed to him three

rifles peering over the rocks, and the one who had spoken was on the other side of the trail.

If these were all, four of them, that would be big odds against himself and the boy.

So Nate decided to do the only thing he could, talk loud, and give the youth warning of his mishap, so that he could avoid running into the trap.

"And who ther devil is you, that takes sich an interest in my hosses?" said Nate in a loud tone he meant should be heard back on the trail.

"Ah, you don't know, eh?"

"Well, I'll introduce myself, and you'll know me better when we have you."

"I am Diablo Dick, once of San Gabriel, but now of the Road, finding it more profitable to get gold with the aid of a revolver than to work hard for it with shovel and pick."

"I've got more men now then I had half a dozen miles back on the trail, when that crazy fool in uniform scared us off, and this time I shall get the big boodle I know you have along."

"Think so?" shouted Nate, raising his voice to its highest pitch.

"Say, I'm not deaf, Nate; so you need not shout at me so."

"I wants yer ter understand me."

"I do, and you must understand me."

"I want no nonsense, and will have none."

"I like you, Nate Nixon, and don't wish to kill you, but I'll do it if you force me to do so."

"What fer? What has I done to harm you?"

"Nothing, only hand out that boodle if you value your life!"

"Yer is away off, for I didn't get any."

"I know that to be a lie."

"I know that you carry a good sum in greenbacks, and I'll stand no more trifling, so hand it out."

"Come get it," and Nate reached under the seat for something.

"Don't be a fool, if you intend to use a gun."

"I hain't no fool."

"I says, come git ther boodle, for I knows when ther game goes dead agin me."

With this Nate Nixon drew from under the seat a tin box with an address on the top, and having two padlocks upon it.

"Here's yer boodle, and ef it don't be ther means o' hangin' yer, Diablo Dick, ef yer is who yer says yer is, then I'm mistaken."

"Come git it, fer I don't want ter throw it down."

"One of you men go and get that box," ordered the chief of the outlaws.

Nate saw that one of the three rifles was withdrawn, and this showed him that there were but three men besides the leader.

A moment after the man appeared in the trail, walking down toward the stream in which the horses still stood.

He was masked and dressed in frontier garb.

"Drive up here, fer I hain't goin' ter wade in ther water fer ther boodle," called out the man.

Nate seized his reins, started up his team, and drove to a halting place near the man.

Then he again took the box and said:

"Now yer gits it, and I don't want no more talk, for I'm behind time now."

The man held up both hands to get the box, when suddenly from across the valley there came a shot, and he dropped forward on his face, almost under the wheels of the coach.

The shot was a surprise to Nate, as well as the outlaws, who at once sprung

out of sight in the dense timber about them, while at the same instant the sound of hoofs was heard coming down the trail behind them.

"Mount and ride for your lives, men! We are hemmed in!"

"I'll even up for this another day, Nate Nixon," shouted the outlaw leader, and there was heard following his words rapid riding through the timber.

A moment after there appeared coming across the valley Little Sure Shot, rifle in hand and leading his two horses, while he called out:

"It was a long-range shot, Nate, but I got him."

"Yes, yer got him dead sure, but look out, fer somebody's coming down ther trail ahead of me, a-ridin' like mad," and Nate seized his rifle ready to greet whoever it should be.

CHAPTER VI. BUFFALO BILL.

The first thought of Nate Nixon was that the newcomer was the mad soldier.

Who else but a madman would ride at that breakneck speed down that steep and rocky trail?

Whoever it was had doubtless heard the shot fired by the youth, and was either a rescuers coming to aid the coach or another outlaw.

The road-agents had taken the idea that he was a foe, and fled, leaving the body of their dead comrade lying by the coach wheels.

The youth heard the sound of the hoofs and stood by his horses, his rifle, hastily reloaded, in his hand.

And he, too, looked for it to be Nate's mad soldier.

Louder and louder resounded the hoofs, as nearer and nearer came the horse, and seated upon his box, rifle in hand, Nate Nixon awaited for the man to dash into view.

Across the stream stood Little Sure Shot, also waiting, and if a foe the horseman would meet a warm reception.

"It's ther spooky, mad soldier, blame him," muttered Nate.

Hardly had he uttered the words when the horseman dashed into view around a curve of the trail. It was not the mad soldier.

But it was some one whom both Nate Nixon and Little Sure Shot recognized, as an exultant shout broke from the lips of both.

The man who dared dash at such a mad pace down that rugged trail held his reins firmly in his left hand, sat upright in his saddle, and with his right hand grasped his revolver.

He was ready for action.

And a splendid looking pair were horse and rider, the former jet black, large, and with points denoting the racer and powers of great endurance.

The rider was a man whom the whole world now knows as Buffalo Bill, though at that time he was making history for himself and the far frontier, building up by his daring deeds the record that has since made his name so renowned.

He halted suddenly by the side of the coach, gave a quick glance at the dead outlaw, and then said, in a quiet manner, natural to him:

"Been in trouble, I see, Nate."

"Yes, Mr. Cody, but between the boy and yourself I came out O. K."

"The boy?"

"Ah! I see him now watering his horses."

"Ho, Sure Shot, glad to see you," called out the great scout, with a wave of his hand to the youth, who now rode up on his horse, leading the animal of the dead outlaw.

"And mighty glad am I to see you, Mr. Cody, for I was wishing for you only a little while ago," and Sure Shot spurred alongside the scout and grasped his hand in a way that showed that he had the warmest friendship for him.

"You've had deadly work here, I see."

"I heard a shot when I was up on the ridge, and supposed that you were in trouble, Nate, so came to the rescue."

"That was not all?" and he pointed to the dead outlaw.

"Oh, no, I've got another inside ther hearse, and three of 'em got away, when Sure Shot dropped this one, and they heerd you coming down ther trail."

"We've had a right lively time of it, Mr. Cody, as I'll tell yer about," and Nate Nixon went on to tell his experience of the last two hours.

Buffalo Bill had dismounted and looked at the masked outlaw, and then at the one inside the coach.

Then he put the last one killed also into the coach, with the remark:

"That was a fine shot, boy pard, and just like you."

"But I don't just understand about this mad soldier you tell me of, Nate."

"I don't understand about him myself."

"Tell me just where you last saw him and I will go and pick up his trail, that is, as soon as I track the three outlaws who attacked you here."

"You will find three of 'em, yer know."

"All right, and be careful to look out fer them, but I wish to see just where they go."

"And the leader says he is Diablo Dick ther Desperado of San Gabriel."

"He lies!"

"Diablo Dick would not be guilty of such an act, if he was a man-killer."

"No, he is not Diablo Dick, but is using his name," and Little Sure Shot spoke with a vehemence that surprised Nate Nixon, while Buffalo Bill said:

"That's right, Sure Shot, stick up for your old pard, for I, too, can hardly believe it was Diablo Dick."

"But that is to be found out, as well as who this mad soldier is, and I'll take the trail at once."

"And I'm with you."

"No, boy pard, you go on with Nate here, and wait in San Gabriel for me, for I'm on a trail I wish your help in."

"Good-by," and going into the timber, Buffalo Bill picked up the trail of the three outlaws and started off on it down the valley.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NAME ON THE SADDLE.

"Well, I feel better, Sure Shot, now Buffalo Bill is atween me and them outlaws, for it's a mighty ticklish thing ter hev as much money along as I hev."

So said Nate Nixon when the scout had ridden off on the trail of the outlaws.

"Yes, and when I saw you handing out the money box to them my heart was in my mouth, for fear if I did kill that fellow who was reaching for it the others would get off with the boodle."

"Sure Shot, let me tell you somethin'."

"Well, Nate?"

"I hain't sich a fool as I looks."

"It would be a fool only who would accuse you of being one, Nate."

"Yer know I has ter keep my wits about me, and I tries ter."

"Yes."

"I has ter prepare fer all as turns up, and I has grit right smart, I kin tell yer."

"Yer see, ther hain't ther money box which I was handin' out."

"No?"

"It hain't."

"It's just like it."

"Sure, fer that are part of my game."

"I hed it made so, and I has in it a lot of packages of green-painted paper, in imitation money, I got from a party as was advertising some kind o' lottery."

"These is all divided inter packages, and a paper pasted round each one with ther amount of money marked on it."

"Yer see they is then tied up together, and wedged in thet box, and it w'u'd take a bank clerk ter know they wasn't nice new money, unless they was broke apart and examined."

"Now, ef they broke ther locks and looked in ter ther box, ther outlaws w'u'd swear they hed got boodle; but they don't take ther time ter investigate, and so I was handin' out ther bogus money, while ther 'tother box are restin' up thar in a leetle hidin' place under ther seat."

"While they war happy at gittin' ther snide money I'd hev been liftin' things fer San Gabriel."

"It would have been a splendid trick on them, Nate; but they would have killed you for it next time they caught you."

"I'd hev saved ther boodle, boy pard, anyhow, and have had to take ther chances o' gittin' kilt next time."

"You're a dandy, Nate, but now I'm going to look up that dead man's horse, for these fellows were in too big a hurry to take him with them."

"Thet's right."

"Yer find him and we hes a horse apiece fer our trouble, and good animals they is."

"Well, I'll hitch this horse on behind, and you drive on, for whether I get the horse or not. I'll soon overtake you, and then I'm going to tell you what I intend doing."

"What is it?"

"I'll tell you soon," and, mounting his horse, the boy rode into the timber in search of the horse of the outlaw whom he had killed.

He did not have a long search, for the horse was found hitched to a tree not far away, and he seemed to have been apart from the other animals of the outlaws.

The tracks of the others showed the three together, and their saddle and outfit were like that of the animal then following behind the coach, while the horse just found was a fine one, and his whole equipments were of a much better kind than the others.

"Ah, I have it!"

"This was the horse of the outlaw leader, and being hitched so far away, he ran to the first animal he could reach, mounted, and made his escape."

"This is a mighty fine saddle, and—what is this?"

"Why, here is the name of Diablo Dick engraved on the horn, and—but no, I will not yet believe that it is my old pard, who has turned road agent."

"Diablo Dick, I admit, was a man who had a bad name in San Gabriel, and he had a record as a man killer; but he had a great big heart, was a devoted friend to me, and if he did run off from Buffalo Bill after the fight with the Comanches it was because he did not wish the scout to arrest him for some crime he was accused of."

"Yes, he ran off then, and in the six months that have passed since then I have not heard of him, until now this masked road-agent chief comes up and claims to be Diablo Dick."

"But I'll have to see him as I knew him, to be convinced."

So musing, Little Sure Shot mounted

his horse and, with the animal in lead, started on after the coach.

He overtook it after an hour's ride, for Nate Nixon was driving rapidly to make up for lost time, and he called out for the driver to halt.

"Nate, here is the horse, and it is the chief's without a doubt."

"You see the name of Diablo Dick here on the saddle, but that does not prove anything to me against my pard."

"Now, Nate, take him to San Gabriel and ask Tom Totten to keep the horse and outfit for me, for I'm going back to follow the trail of Buffalo Bill, for that is what I was going to tell you," and Little Sure Shot spoke in a decided way that showed his mind was made up on that point.

CHAPTER VIII.

SURE SHOT'S LONE TRAIL.

Nate Nixon seemed to regret the decision of the youth, that he would go on the trail of Buffalo Bill, and to urge against it said:

"He has got two hours' lead of you now, boy pard, and night hain't so very far off, while he said yer was ter meet him in San Gabriel, yer know."

"Yes, I know."

"An then maybe yer can't find his trail, and—"

"I wasn't a captive for several years among the Comanches, Nate, not to learn how to follow a trail, and I can stick to Buffalo Bill's, if he stuck to the trail of the outlaws."

"Yes, I'm going back, for you are in no danger now, I feel certain."

"So does I, only I doesn't want ter see yer go, boy pard."

"Well, I feel that it is my duty."

"Did you ever feel a presentiment of evil, Nate?"

"I guess I have."

"Well, I have a dread of evil now."

"I felt it come upon me the moment I saw Buffalo Bill ride away alone, and I determined to follow him."

"He is about as able to take care of himself as any man I know, but, then, he may be in trouble, and I'll feel better when I go to see."

"I'm fitted out with food and ammunition for two days, anyhow."

"Now I'm off," and with a wave of the hand the brave boy started back on the stage trail, riding in a rapid gallop, to go in search of Buffalo Bill, who, he had a dread, might have fallen into some great trouble.

Nate Nixon looked after the youth for a moment, and then muttered to himself:

"I don't just know what ter make of that kid."

"He are full white, fer he's ther colonel's son; but he do know as much about Injuns as they does themselves, and he don't scare at nothing."

"When he were a nobody at San Gabriel, only knowed as the Boy High-flier, afore Buffalo Bill found out who he was, I tuk kindly to him, and what he has done fer me terday makes him closer to me, and no mistake."

"Wall, I must git along, but I does pray that Pard Providence they tells me sits up aloft will take keer o' ther kid; yes, and Buffalo Bill, too, and they kin set this prayer down as coming from my heart."

And so brave, noble-hearted Nate Nixon sent his team rapidly along toward San Gabriel, his thoughts busy with the adventures through which he had just passed.

In the meanwhile Little Sure Shot

had reached the brook in the little valley, gone to the spot where the horses of the road-agents had been hitched and from where their trail led off down the valley.

There were the tracks of four different horses, the fourth being that of Buffalo Bill's big black, and the youth read the signs as cleverly as an Indian could have done, and followed the trail even more rapidly.

The valley narrowed after a few miles into a canyon, and there the stream spread over it, and, of course, the trails were obliterated.

But passing through the canyon there was a plateau of large extent, heavily timbered, and the boy at once began to search for the trails.

They were soon found, and the tracks showed that the horses were no longer at a run when they had passed there; at least three of them were not.

But the black of the scout showed that he was at full gallop.

And Sure Shot kept his horse also at a rapid pace.

After going a short distance the trails bore to the left and toward the foot-hills of the range, along which the stage trail ran, and Little Sure Shot felt certain that the band must have a retreat somewhere in the mountains, and that Buffalo Bill would track them to it.

That they had not anticipated pursuit, when not immediately pursued from the stage coach, the trail showed, the horses of the outlaws going in a walk.

But the black had still been going at a gallop.

Presently the boy halted.

Something in the trail had caught his eye.

The tracks showed that the three outlaw horses had been started off again, as though startled, and had been put to a full run.

The youth turned and glanced about him.

"Yes, they saw Buffalo Bill from here, for they could see back a mile ovr their trail, and they started at full speed.

"And the black was going at a clipping pace, too, when he passed along here."

"Yes, and I'll do the same, for night is near at hand."

"Come, old horse, it strikes me there is work ahead for me to do, and yet here is night almost upon us."

Dashing swiftly on for a couple of miles, the youth was compelled to look about for a camp, for night was closing in, and he could no longer see the trail.

But just as he halted he saw, far ahead, the glimmer of a camp-fire.

He at once continued on, for he had found now a beacon to guide him through the darkness.

He knew that there was no miner's cabin in that region, no lone ranch, and it must be the outlaws, the scout, or band of Indians.

Approaching as near as he dared on horseback, he dismounted and on foot made his way closer and closer to the fire.

He even gained a position where he could see the little camp, and beheld three men seated about the fire.

But he saw a fourth also, and his heart almost stood still as he beheld the form of Buffalo Bill lying prone upon the ground, as though the scout was dead.

"My God! have they killed Buffalo Bill?" and with the words Little Sure Shot grasped his rifle firmly and crept still nearer to the camp.

CHAPTER IX.

AT SAN GABRIEL.

Nate Nixon did not arrive in San Gabriel until a couple of hours after dark.

He was always so promptly on time that a great deal of uneasiness was being manifested by the miners and others that made up the settlement of San Gabriel, for it had leaked out that he was to bring back a large sum in paper money.

When two hours had passed and the coach did not appear, Tom Totten, a good all-round fellow, and the "big bug" of San Gabriel, called for a party to go with him to make a search for the coach.

Tom Totten was the proprietor of the Win and Lose Saloon, and held a controlling interest in the inn, a gambling saloon, and a store.

Then he was captain of the Rangers, the home guard of San Gabriel, a frontier New Mexican settlement that could boast of as many hard citizens as other border camps with a much larger population.

Before the Rangers could mount, however, Nate Nixon's stage horn was heard in the distance, and a wild cheer went up.

There were bets whether Nate had been held up or not, whether he had lost his money or saved it, and if it had or had not been an accident, a breakdown that had detained him.

Only a few months before San Gabriel had been visited by an Indian raid that would have been most disastrous to the place and its every interest had it not been for a warning given by Buffalo Bill to the waif of the camp known as Little Sure Shot, the Highflyer.

Since then, though, the Indians had given little trouble, the camp stood in awe of them, while the road-agents had become most to be feared, and had gotten some rich hauls from the coaches, Nate Nixon having been the only driver who had escaped them.

Now it would be seen if his good luck had stuck to him in this run.

The sound of the wheels was soon heard, and all knew that Nate was driving more rapidly than was his wont.

A few moments more and the coach dashed up to the door of the inn, while a great shout of welcome greeted it.

"Thanks, pard, thanks," and Nate tossed his reins down, raised his hat politely, and then swung himself down from the box.

He faced the crowd, and all was a dead silence until Tom Totten said:

"We were just going to look you up, Nate."

"What was wrong?"

"Road-agents."

"Ah!" and a groan went up from the crowd, for many had money at stake.

"Then you were robbed?"

"No I wasn't."

"You beat them off?"

"Thar is two dead stiff in the hearse, that you kin look at and see ef yer recognize them."

The doors of the coach were thrown open and the dead bodies of the outlaws pulled out and dragged into the bright light of the Win and Lose.

The masks were torn off and a shout went up, and a chorus of voices spoke two names.

The dead outlaws were recognized as two men who were not down on the Black List as "bad men from Bitter Creek."

In fact, they were supposed to be honest men.

"I has ther horses along, and each hed a belt pretty well loaded with boodle," said Nate.

"You are lucky."

"But how did you do it, Nate, and save your money, too?" asked Tom Totten.

"I didn't do it all, fer I had help."

"Who?"

"Ther Boy Highflyer, who used ter live here, afore he were discovered ter be ther long lost son of Colonel Farrar of Fort Comanche."

"Good! the boy is a dandy for chipping in when help is needed," Tom Totten remarked.

"I hed more help, too."

"Who?"

"Buffalo Bill."

A cheer arose at the name, and all crowded more eagerly around Nate Nixon, for each one felt that the driver had an interesting story to tell.

"Tell us about it, Nate," said Tom Totten, eagerly.

"As soon as I has got ther dust out of my throat, so as I kin talk, I will."

Tom Totten took the hint, and a glass of "the best" was set before the driver, who dashed it off with the air of a man who enjoyed it.

Then, in his quaint way, Nate said:

"I'll tell yer ther story, pard, but let me do it in my own way, and then yer kin catechize me much as yer like, fer I'll answer all questions."

"Yer money is safe, and, save ther old coach got a little scraping with a bullet or two, no harm were done our side, and I has two dead men and ther horses and outfit ter show."

"Ef it hedn't been fer ther kid, Little Sure Shot, and Buffalo Bill, maybe you'd hev hed ter find ther story out, bein' as I wouldn't hev been here ter help yer."

"Now, ef I is axed a question afore I gits to ther end of my trail I shuts up—so here goes, fer yer knows what ter expect."

CHAPTER X.

THE DRIVER'S STORY TOLD.

The story of Nate Nixon was listened to with the deepest interest by one and all.

Not a soul dared interrupt him, for they knew if they did he would shut up as close as a clam, while he was willing to answer any questions after he had had his say.

Of his own deeds he spoke most modestly, took no credit for his having risked his life in dashing away from the outlaws or having killed one.

But of Little Sure Shot he spoke in the highest praise.

He told how the boy had left the fort alone, after the sutler had informed him that he, Nate Nixon, was carrying thousands of dollars in greenbacks, and he had followed to protect the coach.

Of the boy's long-range, crack shot with his rifle Nate also told with enthusiasm, but did not consider that it was right to state that the box he was handing out was but a decoy, and not the one containing the money.

Nate knew his crowd, and did not doubt but that some one of the outlaw band might be in the saloon then, listening to him.

Then he told of Buffalo Bill's ride down the steep trail at breakneck speed, and that he had gone off on the trail of the road-agents, who had taken to flight at his coming and the shot of the youth, which had been fatal to one of their number.

"Now, pard, yer has my story as it were, and I wants ter just ask yer who that mad soldier is."

"Never heard of him, Nate," said Tom Totten.

This was the general response, for not one in San Gabriel seemed to know anything about the mad soldier.

"Now, pard, I is open ter questioning, when I says that Sure Shot and Buffalo Bill deserves ther thanks of this layout."

This was the general opinion, and Tom Totten set up drinks for the crowd at his expense, and the health of the scout and the youth was drunk with a cheer.

"Now, tell us what that kid are doin' out here, anyhow, since his daddy hev claimed him," asked a voice, and the question seemed to grate somewhat harshly on the ears of all.

As for Nate, he simply "spotted" the questioner as one he intended to keep an eye on, but answered quickly:

"Ther boy is at ther fort, studyin' lessons, I hev heerd, larnin' ter be a soldier, and scouting round with Buffalo Bill."

"When his father goes East, as he is ter do, I has heerd, in a few months, ther boy will go, too, and try ter enter ther Military Academy, ter be a officer, and a dandy one he'll make."

"Ef he don't git his chips called in afore he goes on ther hunt fer epaulettes," said the same speaker, and Nate saw that he was a surly miner by the name of Nat Farley, a man who was generally feared as possessing an ugly disposition, ever ready to pick a quarrel.

"He'll take his chances of bein' kill, as any man does, and if he hes ter go, few men will meet death as that boy will," said Nate, rather hotly, and, seeing a breeze stirring, Tom Totten asked:

"Well, Nate, what I wish to know is about that mad soldier."

"Did not Buffalo Bill or the young Highflyer know whether any soldier had gone mad and escaped?"

"They said not."

"And how many outlaws did you see?"

"Three ther fust time, and I kilt one, leavin' two."

"Ther next time ther was four, and two of 'em was ther ones as fust held me up, and he got hold of a couple more pards."

"It were ther same man as was chief, and did ther talkin' all along, and who do yer think he said he were?" and Nate turned so as to keep his eye on Miner Nat Farley when he should mention the name of the road-agent leader.

"Who, Nate?" asked Tom Totten, and every ear was anxious to catch the name.

"Why, Diablo Dick."

A loud murmur went the rounds of the crowd.

"Diablo Dick, the Desperado?"

"The worst man in San Gabriel."

"A man-killer from wayback."

"The man who kilt folks on account o' bullyin' that boy, the Highflyer."

"And made ther boy his pard fer life."

"Yes, Diablo Dick, who skipped the camp, I heerd, ter keep Buffalo Bill from arrestin' him fer some crime he had done."

And so the comments went the rounds, until Tom Totten said:

"Well, Nate, it may be Diablo Dick, if he said so, and yet I never considered him a bad man, save that he was awful ready with his gun; but, then, he never took any advantage, and, as I remember, those whose chips he called in were, as we all know, the worst characters in the camps."

"You are right," Pard Totten, he warn't a half bad man, and yet ther road-agent chief said he were Diablo Dick."

"It is a wonder you escaped then, if

he has turned outlaw, for he knows no fear; but we will soon know, if Buffalo Bill and Little Sure Shot are on the trail of the road-agents."

"Thet don't mean thet they'll git 'em," growled Nat Farley, and Nate Nixon did not allow the remark of the miner to escape him.

CHAPTER XI.

SURE SHOT ON HIS METTLE.

The sight that he beheld about the little camp-fire on the creek banks was startling to Little Sure Shot.

Instantly there swept before him the dread of evil he had had come over him.

He recalled his fear that Buffalo Bill was in trouble and needed him.

But had he come too late?

Was the great scout cold in death?

He lay motionless, and to the boy it seemed that he was dead.

Somehow he had never connected Buffalo Bill with death and adversity.

The scout had seemed always to have a loophole of escape.

But had the end come at last, like the pitcher carried once too often to the well?

At first Little Sure Shot was so nonplussed that he could hardly set his mind upon what he saw.

But soon he regained full control of senses and nerves and took in the whole situation.

Finding that Buffalo Bill was following them, and alone, they being three against him, they had planned his death or capture, and he had ridden into a trap.

If a prisoner he must be rescued.

If dead he must be avenged.

Little Sure Shot was on his mettle. The odds against him he did not take into consideration, save to be more cautious.

He would first find just where the horses of the men were.

That they suspected no further pursuit was shown by their placing no guard, for the three men were in camp.

And the three still wore their masks.

Determined to find the horses first, Little Sure Shot silently began the search.

He crept as noiselessly as a snake through the timber, and at last found the horses in a bend of the creek, where there were no trees and good grass.

There was the scout's horse with the rest.

They were staked out to feed, and their bridles and saddles lay near.

First Little Sure Shot went up to the black, saddled and bridled him, and led him to the creek.

The bank was shelving, so that he could ride down easily, and the water was not deep there, nor the distance across great.

Fastening the black, he saddled and bridled the three other horses, and led them to the bank.

He could lead but one across at a time, for there was the camp not a hundred yards away, and the splashing could be easily heard by the outlaws.

Mounting the black, and grasping the reins close of one of the other horses, the boy rode into the stream.

Making a detour, once he got across, he went to where he had left his own horse.

There he left the led horse.

Then he rode the black back for another.

The men could be seen, still seated about the camp-fire, and near it lay the motionless form of Buffalo Bill.

Another horse was taken across in the same quiet way and left with the others.

Then another trip was made for the last of the outlaws' horses.

This one, too, was led across in safety, and when with the others, the boy tied the four together bit and bit, and passed a stake line from each one on the end to his own saddle horse.

Then he mounted his horse and rode nearer to the camp of the outlaws.

Halting when several hundred yards distant, he went forward on foot to reconnoitre.

He saw that the men had finished their supper.

But there lay the form of the scout, and they did not appear to have given him anything to eat.

So, again, the fear came over the boy that Buffalo Bill must be dead.

"I will avenge him," broke from between his set teeth.

More wood had been thrown upon the fire, and it was blazing brightly now.

The three outlaws were plainly revealed, as also the prostrate form of the scout.

It looked to the watching boy as though the outlaws did not intend to remain there all night.

Had they a retreat near in the mountains, he argued, they would have gone to it and not halted there.

So it looked to Little Sure Shot as though they intended to leave their camp before long.

What he did, then, must be quickly done.

Nearer and still nearer he crept to the camp.

The timber was quite open just there, and he had to be very careful in making his way from tree to tree.

At last he got in the position he desired, and brought his rifle around for use.

Another moment and he was covering, with steady aim, the chief of the road-agents.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNERRING SHOT.

Sure Shot had a deadly aim right at the head of the outlaw leader.

Had he fired, the man would never have known what killed him.

But he did not pull trigger.

The rifle was lowered, and the boy gave a slight exclamation.

Just in time to save the man from death the thought had come to him that it was *Diablo Dick, his friend*.

Thus he sat for a moment, undecided.

"I do not believe he is my old pard *Diablo Dick*, but I will give him the benefit of a doubt.

"I would not kill Dick, if he had turned road-agent.

"No, I could not do that; so, whoever he is that leads the band, his life is saved through the doubt in my mind.

"I only wish that I could see his face.

"Now, to pick off one of the other two, and then I believe I am master of this camp."

The youth felt pretty sure that if he killed one of the three outlaws the other two would break for their lives.

Dropping his rifle then, he could use his revolvers and do what else he could to stampede the remaining two, and find out if Buffalo Bill was dead or alive.

If dead, then the boy made up his mind that he would keep hot on the trail of those two men until he could kill a second one and capture the man who he knew had called himself *Diablo Dick*.

So the rifle was again raised, and just as the leader called out:

"Come, we must get out of this, men."

Hardly had the last word been uttered when the finger of Little Sure Shot touched the trigger of his rifle.

The flash and report came together,

and the outlaw at whom he had aimed, just rising to his feet, sank back in a heap upon the ground.

Like a deer the boy ran back to his horses, not waiting to see the result of his shot, and nearing them, he halted, placed his hands to his lips and shouted hoarsely:

"Come on, captain; I got one of 'em!"

Then, with rare skill, he imitated the notes of a bugle giving a call, and leaping into the saddle of his own horse, led the other four animals at a gallop straight toward the camp, as though cavalrymen were charging in response to the bugle call.

But the outlaw leader and his remaining man had not waited an instant after that fatal shot, which laid low one of the trio.

They had started in surprise and terror at the shot, stood a second undecided, until the boy's voice was heard, and then they bounded away like deer toward where their horses had been left.

At first they feared they might have gone in the wrong direction in their haste and in the darkness.

No horses were there.

They gazed about them in amazement and terror.

"Is this the place, captain?" asked the man.

"Yes."

"But the horses are gone."

"What shall we do?"

"Hark!"

It was the ringing peal of the notes made by the boy in imitation of a bugle.

"Come!"

With this the leader bounded into the stream, crossed, followed closely by the other, and they then ran for their lives through the timber beyond.

Each one believed that the scout and troop of cavalry had attacked their temporary camp.

They had merely had time to grasp their rifles before they fled.

Now they found themselves on foot in the night, but two of their band, that had been five in the morning, left to tell the story, and the chances against them, they believed, of their escaping with their lives.

Like deer they ran, and back toward the camp they heard loud voices shouting out orders.

It seemed to them that there were many men.

Then came again the notes of the bugle, and this added to their speed.

They believed that they were being pursued now.

That the way they had gone had been discovered, and on they sped with all the speed and endurance that was in them.

And back at the camp the one boy that had fired the unerring and fatal shot, had shouted hoarse orders, imitated the bugle call, and ridden his horse furiously about, leading the other animals, would have laughed outright at the outlaws' stampede but for that motionless form lying there in the little camp.

Having become convinced that the outlaws were far away, flying for their lives, and not watching him, Sure Shot rode back to the camp, with dread at his heart at what he should discover.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW IT HAPPENED.

When Sure Shot had hitched his horses he approached the camp-fire with a feeling that almost unnerved him, for he had the fear that he would find the scout dead.

There he lay as motionless as before, and revealed by the light of the fire.

But as the glow of the firelight fell upon the boy, revealing him distinctly, there was heard the words:

"Well, boy pard, it is you, is it?"

"I half suspected it, when I heard all that racket."

With a bound the youth sprang to the side of the scout and cried:

"Oh, Mr. Cody!"

"You are not dead, then?"

"Not very, boy pard, though I had a close call; for, see this wound in my head, where the bullet tore along, glancing on the skull, and cutting its way out."

"I see it, and it was very nearly fatal."

"Yes, for it knocked me out of my saddle and stunned me."

"When I regained consciousness I was lying here, bound, and the road-agents supposed I was dead, and were discussing what they would do with my body."

"I am still a little dazed."

"I don't wonder; but I'll soon have you all right."

While he spoke, the boy was untying the lasso that bound the hands and feet of the scout, for the outlaws had bound him and made sure of him, should he not be dead.

"Who is with you, Sure Shot?"

"My horse."

"Well, I at first suspected you had a troop of cavalry with you; but then, as no one showed up, I came to the conclusion that you had, as usual, disobeyed orders, and come on alone after me."

"But right glad am I that you did."

"You see, I had a presentiment of evil, and as Nate Nixon was all right, I came on after you."

"But I got one of the gang."

"So I see."

"He never moved a muscle after your bullet struck him."

"And I've got their horses."

"No!"

"Yes; I sneaked them across the stream first, so as to be sure of them, and put the other two afoot."

"Then we ought to catch them."

"No; I guess not, as they are on foot, and it is night."

"Then, too, I've got to look after your wound, and we'd better go away from here and camp for the night, as, if those fellows did suspect the trick I played on them and return, they might give us trouble."

"You are right, but I don't think they will come back, for they went away from here like scared coyotes."

"There, now you are free, and if you can ride a short distance, we will find another camp."

"Oh, I can ride all right."

"The wound has stopped bleeding, and when dressed will not trouble me."

As he spoke, Buffalo Bill arose to his feet, though he at first reeled as though dizzy from weakness.

But he soon rallied, and, when the camp outfit of the outlaws had been gathered up, Little Sure Shot went over to the body of the dead man and wrapped it closely in a blanket.

Then, with Buffalo Bill's aid, it was strapped in the saddle of one of the horses, and, mounting, the youth and the scout whom he had so daringly rescued rode away, going back on the trail they had come.

"We will camp in the valley near the last hold-up yesterday," said Buffalo Bill.

And as they rode along the scout told how he had come to be ambushed.

"You see, Sure Shot, they sighted me soon after I did them."

"Then I lost sight of them, but followed at a swift run, hoping to get within range of my rifle."

"When next I caught sight of them they were all of two-thirds of a mile ahead, and fast disappearing in some timber."

"I remember now that I saw but two of them, but supposed the other was on ahead."

"I was not cautious enough, for the third was lying in ambush for me."

"That was their little game, and I lost."

"For I remember only a shot, then all was blank."

"When I returned to consciousness I saw a fire, and heard voices."

"It was night, and I found I was bound, and though my mind was dazed, I listened and discovered the situation."

"I had been picked up, bound, and was now believed to be dead."

"As they so regarded me, I decided to play dead until I got a chance to see what I could do to help myself."

"What to do I was considering, when your shot suddenly startled me, and you know the rest."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NIGHT CAMP.

After a couple of hours' ride the valley was reached, and a good camping place found for the balance of the night, for it was now past twelve o'clock.

Little Sure Shot insisted upon doing all the work, staking the horses out and building the fire, and as the scout's head was painful and he felt dizzy, he had to allow him to do so.

The body of the outlaw was first placed apart from the camp, the horses unsaddled and staked out, and then wood gathered and a camp-fire made.

This done, Little Sure Shot looked at the wound in the scout's head.

As both he and Buffalo Bill always went prepared with arnica and bandages, Sure Shot set about dressing the wound with a skill born of much experience.

He saw that the bullet had struck just above the forehead, cut through the scalp, glanced on the skull, and, keeping along it for several inches, had come out, passed through the hat the scout wore, and gone on its way.

Parting the long hair away from the two wounds, Little Sure Shot washed them well, bathed them with arnica, and then bandaged them.

Then he got supper for both of them, spread their blankets, and the two pards, the great scout and the boy, turned in for the night, with no dread of danger, for on foot the two outlaws, did they come that way, could not get there before morning.

Anxious about the wounded scout, it was some time before Little Sure Shot went to sleep.

But he awoke as the sun was rising, and found Buffalo Bill awake.

"How do you feel, Mr. Cody?" he asked quickly.

"Fine, save a sore head."

"I'm all right, thanks to a hard head and your surgery."

"I'm mighty glad."

"Now we'll have breakfast pretty soon, and then shall it be San Gabriel or the fort?"

"San Gabriel, for our man yonder belongs there, and we had better carry the body to Tom Totten."

"So I think."

"And try and find out who are the associates of this man, and the two whom Nate Nixon carried in last night, and by that means discover the rest of the band, when, if I am not mistaken, there

will be some hanging done in San Gabriel."

"So I think," and Little Sure Shot's thoughts seemed busy.

He went about his duties quietly, aided by the scout; the fire was built up, horses given a fresh grazing ground and water, and breakfast prepared.

As the two pards were eating the meal the boy suddenly asked:

"Mr. Cody, did you take notice particularly of the leader of the outlaws?"

"I cannot just say that I did, boy pard, as I was so confused in my mind from this wound."

"I'll dress it again before we leave, and the doctor at San Gabriel can see to it then."

"Oh, it's all right."

"Don't give it another thought."

"But why did you ask me about the leader of the outlaws?"

"You heard what Nate Nixon said yesterday?"

"That he was Diablo Dick?"

"Yes."

"Well, he may be, but I do not believe it."

"Nor do I."

"Why, I had him covered, intending to kill him, last night, when it flashed upon me what Nate had said, and I turned my gun and took a bead on the man I killed yesterday."

"I am glad that you did give him the benefit of a doubt, and I wish to capture Diablo Dick, if he it is, not kill him."

"Well, I don't wish to kill him, or see him killed."

"If he has been again in San Gabriel we can find it out, and I will have to see him to believe he is the road-agent chief, for, bad as Diablo Dick may be in some ways, I cannot believe he is either a murderer or a thief."

"I feel the same way, boy pard, but all the same I am anxious to capture Diablo Dick, and that is what took me to San Gabriel this time."

"But why do you wish to capture him, Mr. Cody?"

"I'll tell you when we return to the fort, Little Sure Shot, for I wish to have a talk with your father, and in your presence, and with Captain Fred Foster also present."

"I cannot say more now, boy pard, but will explain then."

"Now let us take the trail for San Gabriel and find out just who the live pards are of the three dead men we have picked out of the road-agent band, for I am sure those outlaws are out of the camps, and not an organized road gang," and half an hour after the two pards were on the trail to San Gabriel.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PARDS' ARRIVAL.

It was a strange cavalcade that the miners saw riding along the stage trail leading into San Gabriel.

It was nearly noon, and as the men of the settlement were preparing to knock off work for dinner, those of them who were not idle, they saw Buffalo Bill and Little Sure Shot riding side by side.

Both the scout and the youth were well known in the settlement.

Close behind them was a led horse, and strapped to his saddle was the form of a dead man.

In the rear were two other horses, saddled and bridled, but riderless.

The men all turned curious glances upon the party, and saw them ride straight up to the old Mission Inn at San Gabriel.

There Tom Totten stood, talking to Driver Nate Nixon, who did not start

back on his return trip until the next day, and was discussing the carrying back of quite a lot of gold, which, however, he was not anxious to take, until he saw Buffalo Bill and the boy coming up the trail, and then he said:

"If Buffalo Bill and Little Sure Shot will go along to the fort with me this run, Pard Tom, I'll take back all the gold dust yer has in ther mines of San Gabriel, if ther critters kin pull it."

"Well, ask them, Nate."

"But they've got a dead body there, and some led horses."

"They has fer a fact."

"You bet they've been right in it with both feet, and glad I is ter see that ther boy found Buffalo Bill, and no harm happened ther scout, after all."

"He has his head bandaged up, I see."

"So he has."

"Been wounded, sure as shootin'; so ther kid wasn't far wrong in sayin' he hed a feeling of trouble ter happen ter Buffalo Bill."

As Nate Nixon spoke the scout and Little Sure Shot came within call, while behind them a short distance half a hundred men were hurrying along to see what had been the racket, as they had a dead body along and were known to have gone after the outlaws who had held up Nate Nixon's coach the day before.

"Ho, Cody, I'm glad to see you, and you, too, Highflyer."

"What game have you there?" called out Tom Totten, as the two came within hail.

"It's some of Sure Shot's shooting, not mine, and is one of Nate Nixon's foes, who held him up yesterday," said Buffalo Bill.

"You seem to have been in trouble, Cody," said Tom Totten, as the scout dismounted.

"I have been, but Little Sure Shot got me out—no, it is nothing much, only a scratch along the top of my head, fired from ambush."

"I'll tell you about it, Totten, as soon as you have had some one put that body away until it can be buried."

"By the way, see if you know the man?"

"I do."

"It is Lem Hollis; but I would never have suspected him of being a road-agent, any more than I would the two men Nate Nixon brought in."

"Just find out who were their particular pards here, and you'll get at the rest of the band, only don't let any one suspect your intention," whispered Buffalo Bill.

The body having been placed with the other two, for burial that afternoon, the scout and Little Sure Shot went with Tom Totten to his own room to have a talk, Nate Nixon accompanying them, while a messenger had been sent off after the settlement doctor to see Buffalo Bill, and who had far more gunshot wounds to look after than he did cases of illness.

San Gabriel was a remarkable place for health, though for cases of "sudden death" it had few equals, and an undertaker was oftener employed there than a doctor.

Still, "Drugs," as the doctor was called for short, made a good living in the settlement, as he was also the undertaker, and when he lost doctoring a patient by sudden death, he made it up in burying him.

When "Drugs" arrived he was glad to find the great scout was his patient, and he soon had his wound in good shape, and told him that it would give

him little trouble, though it had been a most remarkably close call.

When the doctor had left and dinner was over, the scout, Sure Shot, and Nate Nixon again went with Tom Totten to his room to have a talk, and try and find out just who were the road-agents that were from San Gabriel, living apparently honest lives, but in reality committing crimes against the community by their acts of lawlessness.

CHAPTER XVI. STILL UNKNOWN.

The three dead outlaws were known in San Gabriel.

There was no denying that.

And more, not one of them had been looked upon as men who would lead lawless lives.

They were all supposed to be honest miners.

But they had been killed with masks upon their faces, and holding up the coach.

At least two of them had been thus killed, and the other, Buffalo Bill said, was the man who had fired upon him from ambush, for while "playing dead" in the camp he had heard the man seated at the camp-fire tell just how he, Buffalo Bill, had toppled from his saddle at the shot.

But who were the leader and his comrade?

The former claimed to be Diablo Dick.

If so, he did not then dwell in San Gabriel.

He had not been seen there, or at least reported having been seen by any one, since the great Indian battle, when Buffalo Bill had guided the troops there in time to save the settlement from death and destruction.

Then Diablo Dick, after winning golden opinions from all for his courage, and rendering most valuable service throughout, had quietly skipped away.

It was said that he had feared recognition and arrest by Buffalo Bill, for a crime committed long before.

Whether this report was true or not, Diablo Dick certainly cleared out silently and quickly, and had not been seen until the leader of the road-agents had claimed to be him.

And, strange to say, though Diablo Dick had been looked upon as a bad man, one whom most every one dreaded, that the road-agent chief should be the so-called Desperado many doubted.

It would be next to impossible to find who was missing from the settlement, and then discover the two road-agents, if one was not Diablo Dick, for by the time all could be called together the missing ones could get in and be on hand to report.

The fact that the three dead men were found to be unsuspected miners in their midst caused a very uneasy feeling to fall upon all.

No one seemed to know just whom to trust.

"But who were the intimates of these three dead men?"

Buffalo Bill had asked the question.

It was for Tom Totten to answer, for he knew intimately every man in the settlement.

He knew, too, just who they were, as far as it was possible for them to find out, what they did, and who were their particular pards.

After a moment of thought, he said:

"There were seven men, I recall, who were close pards; seemed to form a kind of clan."

"Who were they?" asked the scout.

"Three of them are the dead ones brought in."

"And the others?"

"Were miners."

"What are their names?"

"Luke Luly, Nat Farley, Mike Lemley, and Porter Payne," answered Tom Totten.

"Where are they?"

"I saw Luke Luly and Nat Farley here to-day, but Lemley and Payne I have not noticed for a day or two."

"Suppose you send for a couple of dozen men, one at a time, Mr. Totten, as though to question them as to who these other two road-agents could be, and among them have the four men you have named appear."

"All right, Mr. Cody; I will do it."

"I will go out myself and select those I wish to come, and who would cause no suspicion in doing so to fall upon them."

Going out, Tom Totten remained for half an hour or more, and when he came in he said that he had sent for as many as twenty men to come, among them the four whom he had mentioned.

As sent for, one by one they came in, and they were questioned as to who they thought might be others of the road-agent band.

Men were very cautious then in San Gabriel of denouncing any one, for it meant a fight, foot race, perhaps a funeral, and few had suspicions to express.

Of the four named, Nat Farley expressed himself very decidedly that it was Diablo Dick and some unknown pard, who had gotten the three others to join them, and that no one else was implicated.

Though examined apart, Luke Luly expressed the same views exactly.

By a coincidence, the two last called in were Mike Lemley and Porter Payne.

They said about the same thing—that the three men who had been killed had doubtless been led away by Diablo Dick and the man with him, whoever he might be, and they would as soon have suspected themselves as the trio of pards that had been proven road-agents.

As for themselves, they said, they had only heard of the hold-up and hour before, having been working a distant mine they had in partnership, and just come in.

This ended the examination, and Tom Totten said:

"Well, we are about where we were before, Mr. Cody."

"Oh, no."

"Why, what have you discovered?"

"Much."

"Ditto me."

"I can put my hands on four of the road-agent band, if not the two who escaped us, and I'll bet big money on it," said Little Sure Shot, and both Tom Totten and Nate Nixon looked at him in surprise, while Buffalo Bill said:

"He is right."

"Let matters rest as they are, for we need search no further, only bide our time."

CHAPTER XVII.

A CALL FOR HELP.

Impressed with the words of Little Sure Shot and the utterances of the scout, who, they saw, understood the youth, neither Tom Totten nor Nate Nixon asked any more questions, for they saw that Buffalo Bill wished to let the matter drop for the present.

That afternoon the three road-agents were buried, and the whole community turned out for the occasion.

Buffalo Bill had been asked by Tom Totten if he and the youth would go as an escort to the coach the next morning, as a large amount of gold was to be sent, and he frankly said:

"I will go for a part of the way with Little Sure Shot, who can continue on to the fort with Nate, and Colonel Farrar will allow an escort from there."

"But I sent a score of my scouts to await me in a certain place, and I will have to branch off the trail to go after them."

"But Nate will get through all right."

This was guarantee enough for Tom Totten, and he decided to send the gold through the next morning.

Bright and early the coach came around before the inn, but the horses of Buffalo Bill and Little Sure Shot were not to be seen, for the scout thought it best to start ahead, before daybreak, and then not be seen going with Nate as an escort.

The horses of the outlaws Tom Totten had purchased from them, for none disputed their claim, as to the victor belonged the spoils, so that the scout and Little Sure Shot rode off mounted upon their own splendid animals.

After passing the last miner's cabin Nate Nixon saw them ahead in the trail, and as he came up called out:

"I'm mighty glad you is along, pard, fer I feels shaky about this trip, being as I has so much dust aboard."

"All right, Nate, we'll follow within hearing of a shot, so as to be near if wanted."

"At Red Range I'll leave you, for I am going after some of my men, to take them on to the fort, for I sent them to a rendezvous, expecting to make a scout with them."

"But things have turned out different since I left the fort; so I'll go after them, but Sure Shot will hang on your trail, and you know what he is."

"You bet I does, and by the time we reach Red Range I guess I'll have passed the danger points, this side of the fort at least."

"Now, I'll push on, and if I want you bad I'll shout."

The coach soon disappeared ahead on the trail, and the two pards followed some distance behind at a pace that would keep them within call.

Several hours passed, and Nate Nixon was drawing near to the steep trail which led down into the little valley where he had last met the road-agents, and Buffalo Bill's coming, with Little Sure Shot's deadly aim, at long range had scared them off.

In glancing well ahead Nate Nixon's eyes fell upon a horseman in the trail.

"It's ther mad soldier, as I am a livin' sinner."

"Jist what I shall do, I don't know."

"I don't want ter skeer him by firing a shot that will bring up my pards, so I'll jist palaver with him, ef he hain't on the shoot, until they comes up and catches him."

So saying, he placed his revolver on the box by his side, and drove on at a swifter pace.

There sat the mad soldier, looking the same as when last seen.

He awaited the approach of the coach, and then called out in a commanding tone:

"Halt!"

Nate Nixon promptly obeyed.

"Where are they?"

"Who, pard?"

"The Dead."

"They oughter be in their graves, but ef they isn't they hain't been seen, and what's more, I don't want ter see 'em."

"You have not seen them?"

"No."

"I must find them."

"I has some pards a-coming who will be along soon, and maybe they kin tell

you, fer they knows more about dead folks than I does."

"Are they dead?"

"No, they are very much alive."

"I don't wish to see them."

"I talk only to the dead."

"Yer don't call me dead, does yer?"

"Yes, you are dead, as I am."

"We are lost spirits roaming upon earth, trying to do that which we left undone when in the body, and by which we will find eternal rest."

"I seek the dead, like ourselves, and must find them."

"Spirit brother, we will meet again."

"Not if I see you first, I'm blamed ef we will," cried Nate, positively frightened by the words and looks of the mad soldier, who wheeled his horse and darted away down the river, unheeding the driver's call for him to halt.

As he kept on, Nate grasped his revolver and fired three shots rapidly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SECOND APPEAL FOR AID.

In five minutes after the three shots were fired Buffalo Bill and Little Sure Shot were alongside of the coach.

"Ho, Nate, did you drive them off?"

"Pard Cody, I has been in close communion with a spirit."

"Nonsense, Nate."

"No, it were ther mad soldier."

"Ha! which way did he go?"

"Down that ridge."

"Well, I will follow in his trail; you go on with the coach, boy pard, and hark! some one is coming."

All listened and heard some one coming rapidly toward the coach by a trail that came along the ridge and crossed the stage road. They sat with their revolvers ready, and a moment after there dashed into view a single horseman.

He half reined up at sight of the coach, but instantly spurred on and called out:

"This trail will take me to Fort Comanche, will it not?"

His appearance indicated his nationality as Mexican, and he spoke English with an accent, while he was dressed as a military scout, and carried a sabre.

"Yes, senor, but may I ask what business carries you in such haste to the fort, for I am a Government officer?" responded Buffalo Bill.

"A band of Comanches from the mountains of the Gila River crossed into Mexico at Fronteras and captured a number of women and children from the haciendas, along with much booty, and the Senor Major Fernando Hermanas, of the Mexican Lancers, has pursued them to the foothills, and sent me on to report to the commandant of the fort that he would beg for aid to continue the pursuit."

The man spoke rapidly, but not a word did Buffalo Bill miss, and he thought and acted promptly, for he said:

"Little Sure Shot, you return with this courier, and on your way go to the ruined old Mexican Mission in the Red Range, and there you will find twenty of my scouts; take them with you."

"You know the country where the Comanches have gone better than any one else, and you can guide the Mexican major there, and have my scouts for valuable allies."

"Nate, you are going on to the fort, and have heard what this courier says; so push ahead with all speed, and report it to Colonel Farrar, and just what I have told Little Sure Shot to do."

"I will not give up the chance of catching that mad soldier; so I follow his trail at once, and if I lose it will go on after Sure Shot."

"Now you know just what to do."

"Senor, you can tell your commandant that this young man is the son of Colonel Farrar, and the best guide in this part of the country, boy though he is in years, and that he thoroughly understands the Indians, having long been their captive in those very hills."

"I thank the senor, and I will at once follow where the young senor leads," said the Mexican scout politely.

"Well, Sure Shot, I leave the work to you, and there is no need of telling you that time is precious, if you wish to rescue those Mexican women before the Comanches reach their strongholds."

"I'm off; but do you take care of yourself, Senor Cody, for I don't half like your going after that mad soldier alone."

"Don't mind me, for I'll pan out all O. K.," called out Buffalo Bill, as the youth and the Mexican scout started back on the trail by which the latter had come.

"Now Nate, give me full particulars about this mad soldier, and then we'll part company, and don't spare your horses in getting to the fort and reporting all to Colonel Farrar, as you know it."

"I'll do it, Pard Cody," answered Nate, and he at once reported to Buffalo Bill just what had occurred at his meeting with the mad soldier.

Buffalo Bill listened attentively, then waved a good-by to the driver, who drove rapidly on, and, dismounting, examined with great care the tracks of the horse ridden by the mad soldier.

"I've got his trail down fine—now to follow him," he muttered.

Leaping into his saddle, he started off down the ridge, following the trail of the strange man who had so startled Nate by telling him that he was a spirit.

In the mean time Little Sure Shot and the Mexican scout were flying along at a rapid pace, for the youth was a good one to set a pace when help was needed.

To the surprise of the scout, the youth spoke to him in fair Spanish, and began to question him all about the force of the Comanches, the way they had retreated, the number of Mexican soldiers under the major's command, and where they then were.

"We'll head those Comanches off," he said, quietly, after hearing the scout's whole story.

CHAPTER XIX.

BUFFALO BILL'S RIFLE-SHOTS.

The old mission on the Red Range, fortunately, lay almost in the trail that Little Sure Shot and the Mexican scout had to follow to reach the troop of lancers.

The latter were some score of miles distant from the old mission, where the scouts were encamped, and to reach Buffalo Bill's men was a ride of a dozen miles from the point where the Mexican had come into the stage trail.

The Mexican scout explained to Little Sure Shot that he had left his command soon after daylight, and the lancers were to push slowly on after the Comanches until he returned with word, or help, from the Mexican fort.

The commander of the lancers had full knowledge that it was not his right to invade American territory, but as no United States troops were near, the Comanches were not far ahead of him, and many captives had been taken, he had decided to push on and send word as soon as possible to the fort of what he was doing, and ask for aid.

Fortunately, the courier had met Buffalo Bill, and the scout had acted promptly and as he deemed for the best, for his scouts, under Sure Shot, could be

with the Mexican commander a day before the United States cavalry from the fort could reach there, and then, too, the young guide would be master of the situation, knowing the country as he did and the Indians, believing that they could not be pressed hard on American soil by the Mexicans.

In just an hour and a half Little Sure Shot and the Mexican scout made the ride to the old ruin, for the trail was a good one.

The scout on duty reported their coming, and as they drew rein there stood just a score of splendid fellows, known as "Buffalo Bill's Rifle-Shots," at the fort.

They were a daring, noble-hearted lot of men, picturesque in their dress, armed with rifles, belt of arms, lariat, and a sabre, splendidly mounted all of them, and ready for any call that might be made upon them.

Crude they might be, wild-looking, blunt-spoken, but every inch men to tie to in distress.

They greeted the youth with a shout of warm welcome, and listened to what he had to say, when the scout in charge, Ben Willis, said:

"Put on your soldier cap and lead us, Little Sure Shot, and in the absence of our chief you will be captain."

"Give the word and we follow, if it's ter tackle the Mexicans instead of helping them."

"All right; we'll push on as soon as our horses have had a short rest."

"Boys, see to them two horses, strip them of their rig, and get us an early dinner, and by that means we'll be in the saddle within an hour, Captain Sure Shot," said Ben Willis.

The two horses were soon stripped of bridles and saddles, and staked out, and dinner was put on, while the scouts began to pack up for a long ride.

In addition to the horses they each rode they had half a dozen led animals in case of accidents, and two of these carried the camp outfit.

Dinner was soon ready, and a good, square meal it was, and then, to relieve the horses ridden by Little Sure Shot and the Mexican scout, Ben Willis ordered two of the extra animals saddled for them, allowing theirs to run loose without weight.

It was just one hour after their arrival at the old ruin, when Little Sure Shot rode to the front with the Mexican scout close by his side, and the others following.

"You are the captain; so set the pace, and we'll keep with you, Little Sure Shot," called out Ben Willis, calling the youth by the name he was known by to all at the fort, for there were no airs about the youth, if he was the colonel's son, and ever since he had been restored to his father and mother his greatest delight had been to go on scouts with Buffalo Bill and be ready for any work or duty.

Knowing what his life had been since he had parted with him a little boy of seven, nearly ten years before, and hoping to see him enter West Point and become a soldier, Colonel Farrar encouraged him in all his wild career on the plains, knowing that it would serve him well in his profession, and thinking it would be time for him to buckle down to hard study when he should go East.

So it was that Little Sure Shot was building up knowledge that would be invaluable to him as an officer of the army in coming years, for he would know the Indian and border life from the very foundation, and have learned all from years of hard and bitter experience.

CHAPTER XX. THE BOY GUIDE.

Little Sure Shot did "set the pace," and it was one that kept the horses in a sweeping gallop.

He was anxious to overtake the Mexican lanceros, find out just how far ahead the Comanches were, and then he knew, with his knowledge of the country, he could move by night and give the Indians a surprise.

So he rode hard, feeling that the horses could rest going at the slow pace the Mexican lanceros would be traveling in pursuit.

Having learned from the scout the direction the lanceros were traveling, Little Sure Shot said:

"Good! We can save a dozen miles and head them off."

"I will leave the trail and strike across country."

"Should we come out ahead of the Indians, why, we will fight them, that's all."

"Anyway, we will head off the lanceros, I know."

With this he turned squarely off from the trail, and one and all of the scouts were delighted to see how unerringly he went on his way, with no hesitation, no uncertainty in his movements.

Suddenly, after having gone a dozen miles, he was seen to halt, place his hand to his ear, and listen.

"We will just reach them, and they are the lanceros, not the Comanches," he called out.

Keen scouts though they were, not another one had heard a sound.

The acute ear of the youth had heard the clash of steel, and as all, after a few moments of listening, caught the rumble of hoofs and clashing of metal, they knew that the young guide had gone true and had made no mistake as to whom they were to meet.

"Come, pard, follow me, for there come the Mexican lanceros," suddenly shouted Little Sure Shot, and, drawing his sabre, he dashed forward, followed by Buffalo Bill's swordsmen scouts.

The Mexican lanceros were just filing out of a thick growth of timber, and, startled by the sight of the charging scouts, with their swords drawn, quickly wheeled from column into line to meet, as they believed, a foe.

But on the left of the young guide the Mexican commander suddenly recognized his own scout, Pedro, and called to his men that they were friends.

Another moment and the scouts had drawn rein, and the Mexican scout said:

"Senor Major Hermanas, this young senor is sent by the great scout Buffalo Bill to guide you in pursuit of the Comanches."

"I met the senors on the trail, and the Senor Buffalo Bill also sent word to the fort for troopers to come to your aid."

"The young senor is the son of the American commandant Colonel Farrar, and he knows this country perfectly."

"I am glad to meet the Senor Farrar, and have his services as guide, for, through a friend at your fort I have heard of you and your strange life," replied Major Hermanas, a handsome young officer, daring and resolute in time of need, as he had shown in invading American territory rather than let the Comanches escape him.

Sure Shot took his proffered hand, thanked him for what he had said, and then remarked:

"You must pardon me, senor, if I ask many questions, but I wish to know just what to do."

"By knowing the country, I left the trail and saved a dozen miles, heading

you off here, and I can do as much for the Indians."

"Bueno! Ask what you please, senor."

"How many men have you, please?"

"Ninety."

"How far do you think the Indians are ahead?"

"Ten miles at least."

"And their number?"

"Not less than a couple of hundred, if not a few more."

"How many captives have they?"

"All of forty—women and children."

"It is now three hours before sunset, and if you will continue to follow on this trail, which they have left plainly marked, keeping half a hundred of your men with you and lending me the balance, I will push through a pass I know well, and head the Comanches off by sunset."

"Good!"

"They know you are in pursuit?"

"Yes, we have seen their scouts watching us."

"Very well; push them as hard as you please, only do not ride into an ambush, and one of my men will remain with you."

"I can head them off within two hours, by the pass I spoke of, and they will find us waiting for them, and the surprise we give them will be worth a hundred troopers to us at least."

"I am ready to start when you are, senor."

"I am also ready," and after a few words of further instruction to the Mexican officer, and being introduced to a lieutenant who was to accompany him with thirty-five of the Mexican lanceros, Little Sure Shot rode straight across the redskin trail, and disappeared in the timber, Buffalo Bill's scouts bringing up the rear.

In a few minutes the two commands were out of sight of each other, and both pushing on their separate ways, the Mexican officer and his men glad to have such brave allies come to their aid.

CHAPTER XXI. LITTLE SURE SHOT'S SWOOP.

There was no doubt in the minds of the scouts and Mexican lanceros who were following him that the young guide knew just what he was about.

He rode ahead at a canter, the Mexican officer by his side, and followed no trail.

He seemed to be anxious to get in under the shadow of the mountains, where the timber was heavy.

After a canter of half an hour he reached the base of the mountain, which there rose abruptly in a bluff, and could not be scaled.

It appeared to have the same look all along, and yet the boy guide did not hesitate, keeping up the same steady gait.

At last he turned abruptly off to the right, toward the bold bluff.

The scouts knew that he was in a land new to them and where the Comanches held full sway.

But they did not hesitate to follow the youth unquestioned.

They knew that he had been a captive to these same Comanches, and as a boy had led a band of Indian youths all through those very hills and mountains.

It seemed to the scouts and lanceros, however, that there was no break in the bold bluffs.

But Little Sure Shot soon came to a small stream and rode into it.

"Where Indian ponies can come down our horses can go up," was the only comment he made, and so kept on in the bed of the stream, the others following in Indian file.

It was soon seen that the stream came down through the cliff by a winding and steep course.

But the leader held on, and the horses of the others followed.

It was a climb of a couple of miles, but when at last the boy turned out of the stream he was on the top of the mountain range and among a group of rocks that completely concealed men and horses.

"The Indian trail to the village was not a quarter of a mile from here, senor.

"It is certain the band has not passed, and the village is a dozen miles away; so they will continue on to it in the night—at least such is their intention—and try to lead the lanceros into a trap some distance from here.

"But we will head them off in that intention, and if Major Hamanas has pushed them hard we won't have long to wait.

"I will go ahead on foot and reconnoitre."

So saying, Little Sure Shot walked on ahead, leaving men and horses to rest where they were.

He had not been gone half an hour before he was seen returning at a run, so that the men were mounted and ready for action when he arrived.

"They are coming; but we have time to get into position," he said to the Mexican major.

Then he mounted his horse and again led the way.

A ledge of rocks running along the ridge hid them from view from any one coming up the trail, and here they halted.

All saw the well-traveled trail not a hundred yards away.

"If no redskin comes from the village and discovers us, we are all right for a surprise; but in two hours' time they could bring a thousand warriors from the village upon us," said Little Sure Shot, and all realized the chances he had taken to get into position to head off and surprise the raiders.

"They will be driving their captives ahead of them, as they are being pursued, so our plan will be not to fire until the head of the march gets where they can discover us.

"Then all fire from on foot into the band of braves, and then charge them, save a few of your men, senor, whom you appoint to go at once to the captives and start them back.

"If the major is close up, all pursuit from this force we can readily beat off, and we can have a long start of the braves from the village, for they will have to send there for them.

"By morning we will be supported by troops from the fort, for my father is a rapid mover in sending men to a rescue.

"You hear them now; so they will be along within fifteen minutes."

All waited patiently, and the Indians soon came in sight, wholly unsuspecting danger ahead of them.

As Little Sure Shot had said, the captives were in front, mounted upon ponies, while many more animals were laden down with booty.

A score of braves were driving them on as fast as they could, while the rest of the band, a couple of hundred in number, were keeping close up.

"Fire!"

The order was given just as the head of the column got even with the ledge, the men rising and firing over it, and sixty rifles flashed together.

"Charge!"

The men had sprung into their saddles and, with revolver in left hand, sabre in right, they were upon the startled Co-

manches, many of whom had gone down under the first fire.

It was a mad rush, and the Comanches fled in dismay, while a number of Mexicans swept around the captives and pack animals, turned them to the right about, and the retreat was begun.

It was a complete swoop for the young guide.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RETREAT BY NIGHT.

It was apparently a scene of wild confusion, and yet all went well and with the system of perfectly disciplined men.

The first volley, the charge, the stampede of the Indians, the getting the captives faced about, the pack animals also, and the rally of the soldiers and scouts about them, to prevent recapture and resist the attack of the Comanches, who quickly saw the force of their foes, that they were four braves to one paleface, and so determined to make a fight for prisoners and booty, all happened within less than a quarter of an hour.

But even as the braves rallied, the notes of a bugle were heard on the trail, and then came the Mexican lanceros, under Major Hermanas, into view.

They came in line of battle, their lances in rest, and half a hundred strong.

With one wild cheer they rode down upon the Indians, who, caught between two fires, stood bravely, almost within sight of their homes, to fight it out.

But the terrible yell of Buffalo Bill's scouts sent a chill to their hearts, and with revolvers in each hand they, too, led by Little Sure Shot, went upon the redskins like an avalanche.

Again the redskins broke, and the second short, decisive battle was won.

The scouts then formed as a rear guard, a few wounded among them, and the lanceros were taken along, the dead were thrown upon horses, not left to be mutilated, and the retreat was begun.

All knew that the firing had been heard at the village, that there would be a thousand braves in the saddle and in pursuit, and a rapid retreat therefore must be made.

So it was begun, just as darkness fell.

With the heavy timber adding to the darkness, all was black, and Little Sure Shot rode to the front to guide the way, no one else knowing the trail.

How he followed the trail through the impenetrable gloom no one knew, but unswervingly he held on, while the Indians, taking advantage of their knowledge of the country, appeared here and there upon the flanks, and ahead, and shot after shot was sent into the gallant band.

Here a soldier was killed, there a scout; next it would be a captive woman or child, and now and then a horse.

But they pushed on, sending volleys whenever they saw a flash, as Little Sure Shot requested the major to do, and finding the chances of death thus made so great, the red marksmen dared not take the risk unless wholly sheltered by rocks.

Slowly down the mountain they went, all feeling that reinforcements from the village were rapidly gaining.

At last Little Sure Shot sent for Major Hermanas and Ben Willis, the scout lieutenant, to come to the front.

They were soon there.

"We will reach the lowlands in a short while, and then, by a hard ride of four miles, I can carry you to a little hill, where we can make a stand and await help from the fort, for if the force from the village catches us upon the plains they can wipe us out."

"You, Ben, can send two of your men by different trails, one to the fort, the other to look up a force I know my father has sent, and which will doubtless come by the stage trail, and we can hold out for a day or two at least."

"If our ammunition holds out," was the significant reply of the Mexican major.

"Then let no other shot be fired unless it is to kill."

"No more firing at random, senor."

"We can fill canteens, and water our horses at the stream this side of the hill I speak of, and that must last us until help comes."

"The lowlands are just ahead, where you see the light, and we'll go at a rapid trot from there, to be able to get into position and ready by the time the main force comes up, for they will come with a rush, you may be certain, to wipe us out before help comes."

The plan of the youth was at once decided upon, and two of the scouts, mounted upon the best horses in the outfit, at once started upon their errands, for they knew that once out of the mountain timber they would be surrounded and cut off.

The party then was closed up in close order, and the rapid ride begun.

Once they had left the mountain trail, the Indians circled around them, and harrowing shots were fired into the crowded ranks.

But on they pressed, caring for dead and wounded, as it happened to be, and never halting long until the stream was reached.

There the horses were allowed to drink all they cared for, the canteens of soldiers and scouts were filled, and the start was made for the little wooded hill.

"They know our intention, senor, and have gone there ahead of us."

"We will fire a volley and then charge in," said Sure Shot.

The volley did deadly work, and revealed how well the youth had predicted, for there were a number of Indians there before them.

But the fire stampeded them, and a few minutes after the tired band were on the hill and at bay, to fight for their lives.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUFFALO BILL ON HAND.

Fires were built in the timber, to show the advantages and disadvantages of their position, and a line of scouts was thrown out to keep the Indians at a safe distance.

The captives were placed among the rocks, the horses grouped together and sheltered as much as possible, supper was prepared, and then the men were placed in position to fight it out.

Then the fires were put out, all save the one where the captives were, and in darkness the devoted band awaited the result.

The Indians seemed to have given up the attack, so silent were they, but Little Sure Shot and others, who knew the redskin nature, were well aware that the reinforcements had come up from the village, and their numbers were steadily increasing, while they were waiting until the peep of day to make their grand charge, which they were determined should sweep all before them.

Slowly the night passed away, and half an hour before dawn Little Sure Shot, Major Hermanas, and Ben Willis went the rounds, waking up the men and preparing for the attack.

Just as they were expecting to see the Indians moving toward the hill,

across the open plain, half a mile distant, toward the mountain, there suddenly burst forth one long line of flame, and fully three hundred rifles flashed, and as many bullets were sent into the mass of red humanity then moving against the hill.

The deep roar and red blaze of one, two, three cannon shots followed, and the bursting of shells was heard and seen, followed by wild bugle calls, a roar of many voices in a cheer, a wild war-cry, and a hundred gallant troopers went charging into the Indian ranks.

"That war-cry came from Buffalo Bill's lips," cried Little Sure Shot.

"Right you are, boy pard."

"He has led the force between the Indians and the mountains," said Ben Wil-lis.

"And, senors, we will go to the attack also," called out the Mexican major.

There was mounting in hot haste, of lanceros and scouts, and out from behind the timbered hill rode fifty lanceros and a dozen scouts.

The dawn had come now, and the charge of the besieged party caught the Indians between two fires, and though there were over a thousand warriors, they fought for awhile only and broke in a wild stampede, the cavalry following them in hot pursuit.

At the head of the command from the fort was a gallant officer by the name of Frank Foster, a captain of cavalry.

It was through this officer and Buffalo Bill that Little Sure Shot had his identity discovered and been restored to his parents.

Allied with Buffalo Bill in secret service work to track down certain criminals, Captain Foster had gone to San Gabriel as a sport, had played his cards well, and in the end had been, through Buffalo Bill, Little Sure Shot, and Diablo Dick, the means of saving the settlement from the Comanches.

Returning to his duties at the fort, Captain Frank Foster had watched the career of Little Sure Shot with great interest, and when Nate Nixon had driven into the post, a couple of hours ahead of his time, and delivered Buffalo Bill's message, Colonel Farrar had ordered Foster to take a force to the rescue of the Mexican captives and the support of the daring major and his lanceros.

Frank Foster could get more out of men and horses, it was said, than any other officer, and certainly he was not long in getting three hundred infantry troopers and three guns on the march.

But when they left the stage trail, a couple of hours before midnight, it was found that they had pushed ahead so rapidly it was not known just which way to go from there, and instantly a halt was called until morning.

But just then there was a cheer heard, and into the midst of the command dashed Buffalo Bill.

He had just come from a lone trail, he said, but told no more.

He recalled just where the Mexican scout had said the lanceros were, the trail the Comanches were on, and he at once offered to lead the command to the base of the mountain before dawn.

Captain Frank Foster as promptly accepted, and the march was begun, Buffalo Bill riding to the front with a dozen of his scouts.

To a man like Buffalo Bill all was plain sailing in a country he had scouted over, and he set a good pace, and more, meditated as he went, and the idea came to him that if the lanceros had pressed on in pursuit of the Comanches they would be well up in the mountains by dawn.

So he pushed ahead with several men to reconnoitre, and thus made the discovery of the retreat of the lanceros, the position they had taken up, and that a large force of Indians was in pursuit, and assembling for an attack.

Thus discovering the situation, he went back to Captain Foster, and guided the command to a point between the redskins and the mountains, and the first the Comanches knew of their presence was the deadly volley the infantry poured into their midst.

Thus had the Indians met with another crushing defeat and severe punishment within half a year.

Leaving the cavalry to press the pursuit, Captain Foster, with Buffalo Bill, rode forward to meet Major Hermanas, who was seen at the head of his lanceros, and with Little Sure Shot by his side.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BUFFALO BILL HAS SOMETHING TO TELL.

The meeting between Captain Foster and the Mexican major was a most cordial one, Little Sure Shot introducing them, and making a few words of explanation as to what had been done by the lanceros.

The victory over the Comanches being a complete one, the Mexicans were invited to camp with the Boys in Blue, and the captives were most kindly cared for by the United States officers.

"That young senor is a most remarkable person, senor captain."

"He led the pursuit; was our guide, and won the victory in the mountains, afterward guiding the way through impenetrable darkness to the hill where we stood at bay."

"You should be proud of him, senor captain."

So said Major Hermanas, and Captain Foster replied:

"We are, for he is the admiration of all at the post, and this but adds another laurel for his brow."

"I predict a gallant career for him, senor major."

During their conversation Captain Foster's men had been preparing breakfast, and the Mexican lieutenants, Little Sure Shot, and Buffalo Bill were also invited to the mess.

After the meal was dispensed with the Mexicans prepared for their return into their country, with the captives they had retaken, and warm thanks were bestowed upon the Americans, while three rousing cheers were given for Little Sure Shot, others then following for Captain Foster, Buffalo Bill, and the American soldiers, all of which the Boys in Blue returned with a will.

As they moved away Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, Captain Foster, I wish to have a private talk with you and Little Sure Shot."

"Certainly, Cody, I have felt sure you had something on your mind since you joined us last night."

"Come, Sure Shot, and we'll hear what Buffalo Bill has to say."

Orders had been given for the care of the wounded, and that the command would remain in camp where they were for a couple of days, as though intending a march up into the mountains against the Indians.

So the three friends, for such the officer, the scout, and the boy were, sat down on a serape off to themselves, and Buffalo Bill began his story.

"I left you yesterday, Little Sure Shot, to go on the trail of the mad soldier, whom Nate Nixon told us of, you remember," began the scout.

"Yes, and I was mighty anxious to go with you."

"I saw that, but as it has turned out, we all acted for the best."

"Now, I picked up the trail of the mad soldier's horse, and followed it for miles."

"At last I lost it, where it entered a small stream."

"While trying to find it my horse started, and glancing behind me, I saw, to my amazement, that I was being shadowed myself, and by nothing less than the mad soldier."

"I wheeled and started in pursuit at once."

"But my horse was tired, his as fresh and fleet as a deer, and he dropped me out of sight."

"But I still stuck to his trail, and again lost it."

"While looking for it my horse gave another violent start, and once more I beheld the mad soldier."

"He was shadowing me as before."

"I believe I was a little upset at this, for he had certainly doubled on me most strangely."

"But again I started in pursuit, and as before he kept easily ahead of me."

"Night was near at hand, and, determined to get within range to bring down his horse by a shot, I spurred on hard."

"I urged my horse cruelly, but to no use, and to my sorrow I found, for I had driven the noble animal so hard that he fell with me, to rise no more."

"With very unpleasant feelings, I assure you, I took off my saddle and the rest of my outfit, hung it in a tree, and, with regret at the death of my brave horse, started on foot back to the stage trail."

"I had not gone two hundred yards from where my horse fell, when right in my path I found the splendid black horse of the mad soldier."

"I recognized him at a glance, and he had been hitched there, as though his rider had seen my horse fall, and had left the animal there for my use."

"At least so I felt, and I at once unhitched the animal and mounted him."

"As I did so, afar off on a cliff, beyond which the sun was setting, I saw the mad soldier standing and calmly regarding me."

"I started for him, and he at once disappeared."

"But I determined to still pursue him, if I could reach the cliff before darkness set in, and so I started after the mad soldier once more."

CHAPTER XXV.

FOUND AT THE LONE GRAVE.

With deepest attention both Captain Frank Foster and Little Sure Shot had listened to what Buffalo Bill had to tell.

When he paused they made no comment.

"They were sure that he had more to tell."

After a minute the scout continued:

"I flanked the cliff, found a trail, and was riding along it when it grew too dark to see."

"But I continued to press on, giving the horse free rein, until suddenly I reined him back with a force that threw him upon his haunches."

"And any other man would have done the same at what I saw."

"In the darkening twilight I beheld, on my right, not ten feet from me, a white cross at the head of a grave, and standing by it a man clad, it seemed, in a fatigue cavalry uniform, yet of white."

"One hand was pointing upward, the other down at the grave."

"I admit I was startled for an instant, but I quickly collected myself and called out:

"Well, pard, got tired of lying in the grave, so you've turned out to prowl as a spook, have you?"

"It was light enough for me to see the white form start, and at once came the answer:

"That is Buffalo Bill's voice.

"Are you Buffalo Bill?"

"I answered promptly, and then came the startling reply:

"You are on the horse of my mad pard.

"I am Diablo Dick."

"I tell you it was a start, a surprise to me; but I was out of the saddle at once and ready to face Diablo Dick, just as his humor inclined, as friend or foe.

"He was the former, for he stepped forward with extended hand and said:

"Buffalo Bill, now I can offer my hand as a square man, and I do.

"I have a story to tell, a mystery to explain; but do you go at once and bring Captain Frank Foster here, and I want the boy, Little Sure Shot, also.

"Much, everything, depends upon them, and I shall await you here; you cannot miss the place, for you can follow the trail from the cliff, the way you came.

"Will you go?"

"I at once promised to do so, mounted the black, after a few more words with Diablo Dick, and then started for the fort.

"I met you, Captain Foster, commanding the force sent to the aid of the lancers, so I could do nothing but guide you then.

"But now, if you will turn the command over to Captain Nevins, I will guide you to where you will find Diablo Dick, the mad soldier, and a surprise for you both."

"I am ready to start at once, Cody," said Captain Foster.

"I'm with you, pard," was the gay response of the youth.

So Captain Nevins was sent for, the command turned over to him, and the three pards started on the trail to solve the mystery of Diablo Dick playing ghost, the lone grave marked with a cross, and the mad soldier.

It was late in the afternoon when the cliff was reached, and Buffalo Bill led the way into a narrow pass, beyond which ran the trail he had taken the night before.

The black horse, in the lead, went on unfalteringly, and the captain and Sure Shot followed, wondering what it all meant, for the scout had offered no further explanation.

A ride of a mile and the timber was entered, and beyond was seen the white cross, while near it stood the form of Diablo Dick.

There was no doubt as to the man, for Little Sure Shot and Captain Foster recognized him at once, and though he was clad in cavalry fatigue uniform and slouch hat, his suit was white.

"Ho, Dick, old pard, I'm awful glad to see you," said Little Sure Shot springing forward.

The hands of the two clasped warmly, and the man asked, his voice quivering:

"Did you think I was as bad as the worst of 'em, little pard?"

"No, indeed, I never would believe you were an outlaw, Dick."

"That is true, Diablo Dick; he defended you through all," said Captain Foster.

"Yes, all those who knew you best did, Dick."

"But you look as though you were playing ghost, said Little Sure Shot.

"I have been, but for a purpose.

"I have something to tell you, Captain Foster, and that will surprise you all," said Diablo Dick, impressively.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STRANGE STORY.

In a short while the party of four were seated near the grave, and Diablo Dick said:

"Little pard, I wish you to listen well, for you are interested deeply in my story, and I hope you will try and look into the past as I talk, for I address you, tell you what I have to say, for the Captain and Buffalo Bill know of what I tell, as soon all will have come back to them.

"It was nine years ago now that an army paymaster was going through this country with a small escort, and with pack mules carrying a large sum of Government gold, sent out of the mines.

"Attacked by Indians, the paymaster was forced to bury it, aided by a lieutenant and a soldier, for he did not wish to trust too many with the secret.

"The treasure lies buried in yonder grave, and is intact, and the body of two dead soldiers, killed by Indians, are on top of it.

"Now, the paymaster and the little force were forced to suffer untold hardships, were captured by Indians, and only escaped after a long while.

"But two only gained the fort, the lieutenant and the soldier.

"It was at last decided to send a force after the gold, guided by the lieutenant, who had been promoted to captain, and the soldier, who had become ordnance sergeant.

"They were accompanied by a scout, eight soldiers, and a little boy of seven, who was allowed to go, as no danger was feared then, his father being in command of the post.

"What happened to them was not really known, as they did not return, and months after bones were found, and it was certain that they were all that remained of the party.

"Several years after an ugly rumor was heard in the fort, to the effect that the sergeant had been false to honor and all, had leagued with outlaws, and, entrapping the party, had allowed all to be massacred, and then divided the booty with his confederates.

"The story was believed, and he was secretly outlawed, and Buffalo Bill had orders to capture or kill him at sight, for it was said he was hovering about the mines.

"To get at the outlaws, if possible, Buffalo Bill and Captain Foster turned ferrets, the one going to San Gabriel as a pretended sport, the other visiting the camps, and then were you, Little Sure Shot, found and returned to your parents.

"This was proof that you had not been massacred with the others.

"But to find the false sergeant was the thing to do, and yet, in Diablo Dick, so changed he was, neither Captain Foster nor Buffalo Bill recognized the one-time sergeant, Leroy Lester, who was said to have been a traitor, while the same charge, I now know, was laid against his commander in the expedition after gold, Captain Louis Leffingwell.

"The truth of all this was that renegades, white men, led redskins to make that attack upon the party.

"Captain Leffingwell was wounded and carried to the Indian village, as was the little boy, yourself, Master Farrar.

"I, the sergeant, was spared by the outlaw leader, for I had once saved his life, and he told me if I would go in with him that he would share the gold with me.

"I promised, for reasons that are plain, and said I would guide him to the hiding place of the gold, for, wounded as he was, Captain Leffingwell did not know,

and would not have told to save his life, even.

"The Indian chief, whom Captain Leffingwell had treated most kindly at the fort, took him and the boy to his village and cared for them, while my outlaw friend, the leader, was killed in a row with his men, and I was taken to an outlaw retreat in Mexico, to be tortured until I confessed where the gold was.

"I did not tell, and years after made my escape and, a changed man in appearance. I came to San Gabriel, to learn that Captain Leffingwell and myself were regarded as traitors, and that he was not believed to be dead, but in hiding.

"My first duty was to hunt down that outlaw band of renegades, whom I heard had found the gold, and so I dared not go to the fort, fearing my story would not be believed.

"The men I killed at San Gabriel were the men who massacred that gold party, and brought ruin upon the captain and myself.

"I was on a trail of revenge, and became known as a man killer—so be it.

"Then I met you, Little Sure Shot, and at last learned who you were, that you were the little boy the Indians had taken with them.

"My next move was to find out the fate of Captain Leffingwell.

"Before doing so, came my lone hunt, for I had become mixed in my mind as to where we had hidden that gold, and had discovered that the renegades had not gotten it, after all.

"So I went on regular hunts, to try and find it, and that would be proof of the innocence of Captain Leffingwell and myself.

"But the Indian raid on San Gabriel came, and, fearing that I would be recognized by you, Buffalo Bill, and arrested, I took to flight.

"I went boldly to the Indian village, and there I found that Captain Leffingwell had been there all these years, that his mind was crazed from his wound, that the Indians regarded him with awe, and only lately he had escaped, taking the chief's best horse, a Mexican outfit, and gone no one knew where.

"In time I left the Indian village, and once more began my hunt for that gold.

"One day I came suddenly upon Captain Leffingwell, and he was mounted upon the chief's black horse, dressed in a tattered uniform, and, to my dismay, I saw that he was mad, for he told me that he was in search of dead comrades, and that he also was dead.

"I hit upon a way to gain his confidence, for I pretended I was a spirit also, and thus he took me to his camp, a mile from here, and he it was who led me to this grave, the hiding place of the gold.

"And more, he said that he stood duty here at sunrise each morning, and I must do the same at sunset.

"I did so to humor him, and I whitened a uniform he had with him, for he had brought several in his escape from the Indians, the clothing of the slain soldiers, and I was plotting and planning how to get him to the fort, when, last night, as I took my stand at the grave, to my joy, you came upon me, Buffalo Bill, I believing it to be the mad captain."

"And where is he now?" asked Captain Foster, in a low tone, he having, with the others, been spellbound by the story told by the unfortunate victim of cruel circumstances.

"He is in our retreat.

"I will guide you all there now, and I believe, if you go about it right, Captain Foster, you may bring the poor captain out of his long dream of madness.

"He is never violent; he has done no harm—in fact, good, for he gave Mr. Cody his horse when he saw his fall with him, and then ran off to hide."

"He talks rationally at times, but then all becomes a blank again to him, and he goes off to search for his dead comrades, muster them, find the gold, and carry it in safety to the fort."

"Come, we will go to the camp," and Sergeant Leroy Lester led the way to the retreat of the mad soldier, a small cabin he had built in a tiny valley.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

The retreat was found, the sergeant going in first, and after a long talk with the mad soldier, he called in Little Sure Shot.

Then half an hour passed away, Buffalo Bill and Frank Foster listening to the conversation, now low, now excited.

Then out came the sergeant, and he beckoned to Captain Foster.

The officer entered the little cabin, and soon after Buffalo Bill heard the startling words:

"Great God! am I no longer dreaming?"

"Have I at last awakened from a long sleep of madness?"

"Thank Heaven I believe now I understand it all, how this wound in my head has kept my brain in thrall for long years."

"Yes, I see it all now."

"Sergeant Lester, did you say that the scout Buffalo Bill was also with you?"

"Yes, sir," and Sergeant Lester called for Buffalo Bill.

Instantly the captain recognized him, and as he grasped his hand said:

"I am glad to see you, Cody, glad indeed."

"I see all now as it is, and that I have been mad for long years, for this boy has almost grown to manhood since we went on the search for that gold."

"At last, at last, all is as clear as noon-day, and my mind looks back into the past as upon a frightful dream."

It was a pleasant party that camped that night in the little cabin, and bright and early the next morning Buffalo Bill started for the stage trail to head off the returning force under Captain Nevins.

They came along at noon, and the captain at once sent an ambulance and squad of cavalry with the scout to the retreat of the mad captain.

The next day the grave was opened, the two bodies removed, and beneath was found the long-hidden gold.

Safely the gold was taken to the fort, and the welcome Captain Leffingwell and Sergeant Lester met with gladdened their hearts.

As for the outlaws who had held up Nate Nixon, Buffalo Bill had spotted them, as has been seen, and he and Little Sure Shot captured Nat Farley and the others, one of whom, the leader, had pretended to be Diablo Dick.

Retiring from the army, Colonel Farrar went East, and after half a year spent in study, Sure Shot, the Buckskin Brave, received an appointment as cadet at West Point.

That was the beginning of a new career; for, going there, he graduated with honor, in due time, and to-day is known as one of the most gallant officers and efficient masters of the redskins in the army. As such master, and as a careful watcher of the Indian reservations, Buffalo Bill has been his guide; and on many a perilous trail, in pursuit of the "hostiles," as well as the renegades and out-

laws who even yet infest portions of the wilderness, the two "hearts of oak" have made many an exciting chapter in the true romance of the Wild West.

THE END.

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